

Welcome to today's hearing to look back and take stock of the recent performance of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, or the CDC.

I speak for many of my colleagues when I say that the COVID-19 pandemic revealed that we did not have the CDC we thought we had.

Before I continue my remarks, I want to be clear. The COVID-19 pandemic was an immense challenge for public health agencies, healthcare providers, every level of government, and the American People.

There were always going to be mistakes made and we need to avoid the distortions of hindsight.

I also believe that there are many hardworking, talented doctors and public health experts working at the CDC who want to do their part to keep Americans safe.

One of my biggest frustrations, however, with the CDC is that when you look at all of the talent, all of the scientific knowledge, technical resources, and immense funding we have put into the agency, the end product is somehow less than the sum of its parts.

It's reasonable for the American people to expect CDC to use the best available science when preparing guidance and recommendations. All too often during the pandemic, the CDC appeared to work backwards.

The agency seemed to first decide its preferred policy outcome, whether that was universal masking, vaccine mandates, shutting down businesses, or school closures. Once the policy was decided, the agency sought out data supporting that policy.

Data that could undermine CDC's preferred outcome was ignored or discounted.

Particularly if the data came from outside the CDC.

As we saw during the COVID-19 pandemic, the CDC's recommendations carry great weight.

There is perhaps no better example of this than the process creating CDC's school reopening guidance. The damage wrought by school closures has been enormous and well documented. I do not believe my kids education has recovered yet from these closures, even as we speak.

The single biggest factor determining whether schools were in-person or remote was the political power of public-school teachers unions.

At a time when parents and school systems were desperate for accurate public health guidance, the CDC allowed the group most opposed to reopening to directly edit its finalized guidance.

CDC Director Dr. Walensky was even forced to state on national television that her school reopening statements, many took as a CDC position, she made were given “in a personal capacity.”

As best I can tell this was the only time she spoke “in a personal capacity” on an issue related to CDC guidance while agency Director.

In addition, when the Department of Labor issued its nationwide vaccine mandate for companies with 100 or more employees in November 2021, it cited CDC science and guidance more than 80 times to justify the mandate.

At the time the mandate was issued, there was a growing body of evidence, largely ignored by the CDC, indicating that the vaccines Did Not Stop transmission. Thankfully, the Supreme Court struck down this mandate after only two months, ruling it as unconstitutional.

The CMS vaccine mandate for healthcare providers, which only ended on May 1st of this year, also relied heavily on the CDC, citing to the agency over 50 times.

Thousands of healthcare workers, who were heralded as heroes during the early months of the pandemic, lost their jobs in part because of CDC's reluctance to admit that the limitations of the COVID-19 vaccines and failure to acknowledge that natural immunity can confer adequate protection.

The problems at the CDC that led to the failures we saw during the COVID-19 pandemic are not new. The CDC made mistakes during its response to Ebola and Zika and other smaller, localized events.

What differentiates the mistakes made during COVID-19 was the scale of the emergency and the impact of those failures on the American people.

It is appropriate that the CDC's failures during COVID-19 prompted the agency to conduct an internal review.

The first step is admitting you have a problem. This review has now led to a reorganization that appears, on its face, to be extensive. But there's no way for us to tell without more information from CDC.

As part of the reorganization, CDC has asked Congress for extensive legal authorities that would require state and local governments, pharmacies, hospitals, and other healthcare providers to report to the CDC health-related information.

This also had huge implications for privacy and data security.

In May, this Committee wrote to Director Walensky, requesting information and documents related to the review and reorganization.

Congress needs this information to understand and independently assess CDC's reorganization.

Congress is constitutionally entitled to this information. We did, however, receive a four-page letter last night that mostly reflects what is already posted on their website. I hope that CDC will provide the complete documentation requested in our letter that they did not provide last night.

In closing, until we get full cooperation, the CDC's request for new legal authorities cannot move forward.

In today's hearing, we will hear from witnesses who will help us explore what reforms are appropriate and necessary at the CDC.